

Hearing Instrument Consumers Rights



What is the Board of Hearing and Speech?

The Board was created by the Washington Legislature to protect the public. It regulates the practice of services provided by hearing instrument fitter/dispensers through licensing and of audiologists and speech-language pathologists through certification. In addition, it is charged with the investigation of complaints and of establishing matters of policy.

The Board is comprised of ten volunteer members—three public members, two hearing instrument fitter/dispensers, two audiologists, two speech-language pathologists, and one physician. Members of the Board are appointed by the Governor to serve three-year terms.

What are the Qualifications of Hearing Instrument Fitter/Dispensers?

Hearing Instrument Fitter/Dispensers currently in practice in Washington may have completed on-the-job-training, an apprenticeship or higher academic level preparation. In addition, each fitter/dispenser will have passed the examination in order to be licensed by the State of Washington.

An apprentice is a permit holder practicing under the direct supervision of a licensed hearing instrument fitter/dispenser or certified audiologist.

What are the qualifications of Certified Audiologists?

Audiologists dispensing in Washington State must hold a minimum of a Masters Degree from an accredited university, pass the fitting/dispensing examination and have supervised clinical experience.

How do I know if my Fitter/Dispenser or Audiologist has Washington State Credentials?

All licensees, certificate and permit holders must have a copy of their state credentials posted in a conspicuous location at their places of employment.

How do I check on the credential of a Fitter/Dispenser, Audiologist, or Permit holder?

If you wish to check on the status of credentials, call the Hearing and Speech Program at (360) 236-4914 or write to PO Box 47869, Olympia, WA 98504. The Program will be able to tell the status of a credential and if disciplinary action has been taken.

What are my rights as a client?

You have the right to ethical and professional treatment regardless of your age, sex, race, color, religion, national origin or disability.

In addition, you have the right to a clear written description of the services, fees and billing information. The written contract concerning your purchase of the hearing instrument must include the name of the seller, signature, license, certificate or permit number, address and phone number of the regular place of business, a description of the instrument furnished including make, model, serial number, circuit options, and the term “used” or “reconditioned” if applicable. Costs will be detailed including charges for testing and fitting, the retail cost of the hearing instrument(s) and ear mold(s), when applicable, and the terms of the sale.

Client records are confidential and, with few exceptions, may not be released by the fitter/dispenser, audiologist or permit holder without the client’s consent.

What is the recision period?

The recision period is the thirty-day period after the fitting of the instrument when you can return the instrument for reasonable cause, in its original condition less normal wear and tear, for refund. The client will receive a refund within 10 business days. The fitter/dispenser or audiologist has the right to deduct 15 percent of the original purchase price or one hundred fifty dollars per instrument, whichever is less. During this thirty-day period, if you return the instrument to the fitter/dispenser or audiologist for modification or repair, the repair days are not counted in the recision period. Clients are advised to keep copies of all contracts, dates and types of services received.

What if I am uncomfortable with my hearing instrument appointment or do not understand what is being done or why it is being done?

As the client, you have the right to fully understand what is being done and why. You have the right to ask the fitter/dispenser, audiologist or permit holder about your evaluation and fitting. You may wish to take a family member or friend with you to your appointment.

What if I have a complaint?

If attempts to talk with the fitter/dispenser, audiologist or permit holder are unsuccessful, you should contact the Board of Hearing and Speech if the professional has:

- n Misled or lied to you about the services or instrument dispensed, recision rights, the care you received, or the clinical or financial aspects of your evaluation and fitting.
- n Treated you while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- n Abused or mistreated you in any way.
- n Released information about you and your care to anyone without your approval.
- n Been negligent in your treatment.

Be sure to include the name of the fitter/dispenser, audiologist or permit holder along with specific information regarding the complaint. Remember to provide the Board with your name, address and phone number.

What happens after I file a complaint?

The Board of Hearing and Speech is authorized by State law to discipline fitter dispensers, audiologists and permit holders who have been found to be in violation of the rules. All complaints are reviewed. If needed, an investigation may include reviewing the client records and interviewing all persons involved in the complaint. A decision regarding the complaint is based on the information the Board has gathered.

If the fitter/dispenser, audiologist or permit holder is found in violation of the law, there are several actions which may be taken by the Board.

If the licensee, certificate holder or permit holder has not violated the rules, no action will be taken by the Board and the complaint will be closed.

The Board will notify you when the investigation is complete.

If you believe you have been injured, you may want to consult an attorney.

Presented by the
Washington Board of Hearing and Speech
Regulating the Practice of Hearing Instrument Fitter/Dispensers,
Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists
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